

# Occupant Feedback Methods for Building Diagnostic Systems



## TECHNICAL REPORT

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# Preface

The Public Interest Energy Research (PIER) Program supports public interest energy research and development that will help improve the quality of life in California by bringing environmentally safe, affordable, and reliable energy services and products to the marketplace.

The Program's final report and its attachments are intended to provide a complete record of the objectives, methods, findings and accomplishments of the High Performance Commercial Building Systems (HPCBS) Program. This Commercial Building Energy Benchmarking attachment provides supplemental information to the final report (Commission publication # 500-03-097-A2). The reports, and particularly the attachments, are highly applicable to architects, designers, contractors, building owners and operators, manufacturers, researchers, and the energy efficiency community.

This document is the seventeenth of 22 technical attachments to the final report, and consists of research reports:

- Design of an EMCS/CMMS User Interface for Building Occupants (E5P2.2T4b2)
- A Tenant Interface for Energy and Maintenance Systems (E5P2.2T4c)

The Buildings Program Area within the Public Interest Energy Research (PIER) Program produced this document as part of a multi-project programmatic contract (#400-99-012). The Buildings Program includes new and existing buildings in both the residential and the nonresidential sectors. The program seeks to decrease building energy use through research that will develop or improve energy-efficient technologies, strategies, tools, and building performance evaluation methods.

For the final report, other attachments or reports produced within this contract, or to obtain more information on the PIER Program, please visit <http://www.energy.ca.gov/pier/buildings> or contact the Commission's Publications Unit at 916-654-5200. The reports and attachments are also available at the HPCBS website: <http://buildings.lbl.gov/hpcbs/>.

# Abstracts

## [Design of an EMCS/CMMS User Interface for Building Occupants](#)

In this paper, we describe the design of a user interface for energy and maintenance systems in commercial buildings. The user interface is designed for use by occupants (tenants) of commercial buildings. Our hypothesis is that by allowing tenants access to information from the energy and maintenance systems and by giving them some control over these systems, energy and maintenance performance can be improved. We used interviews with potential users and existing energy and maintenance databases to guide the design. We found that the feature most important to occupants is the ability to track service requests. We included several features from the interviews that should improve occupant satisfaction with maintenance and operations and simultaneously improve operational efficiency. We show results of implementing the user interface in two government offices.

## [A Tenant Interface for Energy and Maintenance Systems](#)

We describe the design of a user interface for energy and maintenance systems in commercial buildings. The user interface is for use by occupants (tenants) of commercial buildings. Our hypothesis is that by allowing tenants access to information from the energy and maintenance systems and by giving them some control over these systems, energy and maintenance performance can be improved. We used interviews with potential users and existing energy and maintenance databases to guide the design. In this paper we describe the design of a Tenant Interface for Energy and Maintenance Systems (TIEMS). TIEMS is maintenance databases to guide the design. TIEMS is designed to operate as a component of GEMNet.

# HPCBS

## High Performance Commercial Building Systems

### Design of an EMCS/CMMS User Interface for Building Occupants

*Element 5. Integrated Commissioning and Diagnostics*

*Project 2.2 - Monitoring and Commissioning of Existing Buildings*

*Task 2.2.4 - Develop methods of incorporating feedback from occupants into diagnostic systems*

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# Design of an EMCS/CMMS User Interface for Building Occupants

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## ABSTRACT

*In this paper, we describe the design of a user interface for energy and maintenance systems in commercial buildings. The user interface is designed for use by occupants (tenants) of commercial buildings. Our hypothesis is that by allowing tenants access to information from the energy and maintenance systems and by giving them some control over these systems, energy and maintenance performance can be improved. We used interviews with potential users and existing energy and maintenance databases to guide the design. We found that the feature most important to occupants is the ability to track service requests. We included several features from the interviews that should improve occupant satisfaction with maintenance and operations and simultaneously improve operational efficiency. We show results of implementing the user interface in two government office buildings.*

## INTRODUCTION

Energy and maintenance systems in commercial buildings consist of digital control devices, a communications network, databases, applications for various functions, and a user interface. One of the most advanced energy and maintenance systems developed to date is GEMNet (Piette et al., 2002). GEMNet is an integrated information technology infrastructure for energy and maintenance management. It uses a common database system for all components and an open communications protocol called BACnet® (ASHRAE 2001).

GEMNet uses modern web-based technology for its user interface. However, the intended users of GEMNet only include maintenance personnel. The way that building occupants interact with GEMNet is by making a telephone call to someone in the maintenance department to request service or report a problem. The maintenance personnel manually enter the service request into GEMNet, sometimes long after the phone call has been made.

Our work on the interaction between building occupants and energy and maintenance systems (Federspiel 1998; Federspiel 2001) suggests that building occupants should also be considered users of energy and maintenance systems. Until recently this has been considered an unwise, even radical, idea among facility management professionals. However, providing tenants with a user interface to energy and maintenance systems should improve thermal comfort, improve the performance of energy management strategies, eliminate some redundant service requests, and improve the quality of data in maintenance databases. A well-designed user interface should also improve the satisfaction of the occupants with the services provided to them by maintenance personnel.

In this paper we describe the design of a tenant user interface for energy and maintenance systems. The user interface is designed to operate as a component of GEMNet. The next section covers the methods we used for design. The following section includes the results of our pre-design investigations, a description of the design itself, and results of a field trial.

## METHODS

We used three sources of information to guide the design of the user interface: interviews with tenants, meetings with maintenance personnel, and historical maintenance records.

We interviewed three potential users from three different tenants in a U.S. federal building. Tenants are defined as organizations or agencies occupying the building. The occupants who we selected were chosen



because they are one of the persons who their organization has selected to be a primary point of contact for reporting building-related problems to the maintenance organization. This fact means that they have considerable experience with maintenance activities and that they are likely to use the user interface frequently. Not all tenants have selected individuals to be points of contact for maintenance issues. Occasionally individuals other than one of the primary points of contact report service requests to the maintenance organization.

We asked questions designed to provide information about how the problem reporting process currently works, their satisfaction with the current process, their needs for changes, and whether or not they would be receptive to our proposed design ideas. The interviews were conducted in-person. The operations manager was present for one of the three interviews. We did not use the interviews to help us with the layout of the user interface. A copy of the interview questions is listed in the Appendix.

We held five meetings with the building energy and maintenance staff to discuss our concepts for the design of the user interface. These meetings included the Area Manager, the Operations Manager, the GEMNet Program Manager, the software engineer who developed the GEMNet code, and a few other maintenance personnel who worked for the Operations Manager or the GEMNet Program Manager. Not all of these people attended every meeting. We described our previous research results, proposed our design for the user interface, and asked for their feedback.

Federspiel (1998, 2001) analyzed maintenance records from hundreds of buildings covering a duration of several years in total. His analysis shows that 75% of environmental complaints reported by occupants and recorded in maintenance databases involve thermal conditions (too hot or too cold). Taken together, thermal complaints are the most common kind of service request from occupants. In well-controlled buildings about half of these complaints occur when the temperature is within the comfort zone defined by ASHRAE (1992). We used these findings to guide the design of the user interface.

To test the user interface we implemented the user interface in two buildings. One building was 100,000 square feet, and the other was 400,000 square feet. We recruited three lead users from three different tenants of these two buildings. The lead users were recruited for the same reasons used to recruit the occupants who we interviewed. The lead users were not the same as the occupants who we interviewed, and the field trial was not conducted in the same building as the interviews. To assess the impact of the user interface we tracked service requests submitted through the user interface and by phone before and after the user interface was deployed. All service request reported through the user interface were automatically entered into the maintenance database and flagged as originating from the user interface. Service requests submitted by phone were entered into the maintenance database by hand, so it is possible that some service requests submitted by phone were not recorded. However, there is no reason to suspect that the fraction of missing phone requests changed after deploying the user interface. We asked the lead user who used the user interface most for feedback about its design.

We used the statistical test described in Fleiss (1981) for comparing two Poisson parameters to test whether or not there is evidence that the service request rate after deploying the user interface is different than the service request rate prior to deploying it. The null hypothesis for this test is that the arrival rates are equal. The test statistic is as follows:

$$S = \frac{\left| \frac{k_A}{k_A + k_B} - \frac{T_A}{T_A + T_B} \right| - \frac{1}{2(k_A + k_B)}}{\sqrt{\frac{\frac{T_A}{T_A + T_B} \left( 1 - \frac{T_A}{T_A + T_B} \right)}{k_A + k_B}}}$$

where  $k_A$  is the number of service requests prior to deploying the user interface,  $k_B$  is the number of service requests after deploying the user interface,  $T_A$  is the duration over which service requests were counted prior to deploying the user interface, and  $T_B$  is the duration over which service requests were counted after deploying the user interface. Under the null hypothesis,  $S$  is approximately standard normal.

## RESULTS

### Interviews and pre-design analysis

From the interviews with tenants, we learned the following:

1. All tenants currently report service requests by telephone. Office assistants usually report problems on behalf of others.
2. The average satisfaction level with the reporting process was 2 on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the most satisfied and 5 the least satisfied.
3. All tenants complained about not being able to track the status of service requests. Some tenants would prefer to check status at a web site, while others would like to receive email. Some tenants want to be able to check indoor temperatures from a browser, and some tenants would like to be able to access maintenance notices from a browser or by email.
4. Tenants sometimes submit more than one service request for the same problem because they cannot track the status of their service requests and because they think it will reduce the response time.
5. Two of the tenants surveyed said they would use a web-based service request form.
6. One of the tenants said that they would be more likely to report problems if it were easier to report them.

Maintenance personnel told us that it is common for maintenance or construction activities to produce many redundant service requests. The information that they provided was anecdotal, but it was supported by data in maintenance databases. For example, in maintenance databases we analyzed, we found “clusters” of thermal complaints that were related to shutting down air-handling equipment for maintenance purposes and for construction purposes. The information provided by the maintenance personnel reinforced our concept of including a mechanism for the operations manager to post messages to the user interface informing occupants of activities such as maintenance or construction.

From results in Federspiel (1998, 2001) and from maintenance databases that we analyzed, we learned the following:

Temperature complaints are the most common service request.

In well-controlled buildings, half of the temperature complaints occur when the temperature is within the bounds specified by ASHRAE (1992).

Data quality in maintenance databases is poor. Most of the fields are populated by hand, and service requests are relayed between two or three people before they are entered in the database.

### Design

Based on these findings, we included four key features in the user interface. The first is the ability to check the status of service requests. User's can check the status of all service requests they submitted and filter the display by status condition. We did not originally plan to include this feature in the user interface, but it was clear from the interviews that this is one of the primary needs of the occupants.

The second feature checks for service requests submitted from the same location during the past two hours and displays them when a service request is submitted. The design intent is to eliminate redundant service requests. The user interface does not prevent the user from submitting the request because it is possible that a second service request will contain important information about a problem that was not contained in the first service request.

The third feature of the user interface is a list of notices that the maintenance personnel feel will convey useful information to the tenants. Tenants only see notices that apply to their location. Maintenance personnel can specify the length of time that the notices run.

The fourth important feature of the user interface is the ability to check indoor temperatures. This feature is made possible and relatively simple by the fact that GEMNet control devices communicate using an open protocol called BACnet®. GEMNet polls thermostats every five minutes and places the data in a circular buffer. The user interface displays the most recent temperature value from the GEMNet database corresponding to the location specified by the user. User's choose a default location that becomes part of their profile. If temperature data are available, then the user interface shows users the temperature at the complaint location when they submit a service request.

Figure 1 shows a site diagram of the user interface. The solid lines show links between pages. The dashed boxes show sets of related pages. The features described above are distributed throughout the user interface. For example, when a tenant logs in he or she is immediately shown a table of service requests previously submitted, and the temperature for their default location is shown in a sidebar. Figure 2 shows the home page, and Figures 2-8 show screen shots of different pages that make up the user interface.

## Field Trial

We trained the lead users and the operations manager how to use the user interface in mid-September of 2002, and they started using it in October. Figure 9 shows the number of service requests submitted to the maintenance organization by three of the lead users. The other lead users did not submit any service requests through the user interface. One of the three lead users shown here only submitted one of nine service requests through the user interface during the October – December time period. Prior to February 2002, service requests were not recorded in the maintenance database, so no data are available prior to February 2002.

The number of service requests increases throughout the year, possibly the result of a learning curve on the part of the maintenance personnel responsible for recording service requests. The figure demonstrates that some occupants will use the web-based user interface for a significant fraction of service requests, eliminating the labor required to answer phone requests.

Table 1 shows the results of testing the hypothesis that the service request rate from these lead users was the same before the user interface was deployed as it was after. We compared the three-month post-deployment period with the three months prior to deployment because of the increasing trend in the pre-deployment interval. The probability of observing a larger test statistic by chance is 25%, so we conclude that the difference is not statistically significant.

**Table 1: Service request rate comparison**

| duration                   | counts | Req/month | s    |
|----------------------------|--------|-----------|------|
| Jul – Sep, 2002 (3 months) | 66     | 22        | 0.67 |
| Oct – Dec, 2002 (3 months) | 75     | 25        |      |

We asked the most prolific user to provide feedback on the user interface. She said “I love the system”, but she had critical comments about the design of the profile pages.

Although the operations managers told us that they thought the notice-posting feature would be useful, we found that they did not use it.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of the field trial illustrate several important points. The first is that some occupants will make significant use of a web-based interface for reporting and tracking service requests. This fact implies that the user interface could reduce the labor required to answer phone calls for service requests. It also implies that the user interface can improve the quality of data in a maintenance database because all of the information reported through the user interface is automatically entered into the maintenance database.

Another important point is that even the most prolific lead users sometimes still need to use the telephone to report service requests. Some service requests are probably too critical to rely on a computer-based system for quick response.

A third point has to do with “nuisance” service requests. Some facility managers are concerned that making it easy to submit service requests will increase the number of service requests. One of the occupants who we interviewed said they would submit more service requests if it were easier to submit them. Although the service request rate was higher during the post-deployment period, it is not apparent from the results of the field trial that the user interface changes the rate at which service requests are submitted. The hypothesis test failed to produce a test statistic large enough to conclude that the difference is real. The fact that the requests come from just three users makes the results even less conclusive. More data are needed to conclusively determine the impact of the user interface on the frequency of service requests.

The user interface is appropriate for any size building. It could be useful for organizations with a single building, for a campus of buildings, or for organizations that have a set of buildings distributed over a large geographical area. It could be used to augment a maintenance call center, reducing the labor required for the call center.

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## APPENDIX: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### TENANT INFORMATION

How long have you been working in this building? \_\_\_\_\_ mos/yrs

How many service requests have you reported in total? (an approximate number) \_\_\_\_\_

How many service requests do you report on an AVERAGE

week? \_\_\_\_\_

month? \_\_\_\_\_

---

### CALL-IN SERVICE REQUEST

How do you report Service Requests? (please circle)

Phone Call                      Other : \_\_\_\_\_

How satisfied are you with the current way to report service requests? (please circle)

1= Very Satisfied ... 5= Very Unsatisfied

1 ----- 2 ----- 3 ----- 4 ----- 5

Have you had any issues with the calling service? (please circle)

**YES | NO**

If yes, why (check all that apply):

- \_\_\_\_\_ Agent did not accurately enter data
- \_\_\_\_\_ Long wait to reach agent
- \_\_\_\_\_ Phone not always available when attempting to report issue
- \_\_\_\_\_ Other, please explain: \_\_\_\_\_

Would you make any changes to the call service? (please circle)

**YES | NO**

If yes, please describe: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

---

Overall, how satisfied are you on the call service to report building service requests?  
1= Very Satisfied ... 5= Very Unsatisfied

**1 ---- 2 ---- 3 ---- 4 ---- 5**

---

Would you use a web (internet) based form to submit service requests and check their status?

**YES | NO**

If yes, why?    Easier to use  
                    No waiting time on the phone  
                    Other: \_\_\_\_\_

If no, why?     Hard to user  
                    Not familiar with using a web browser  
                    Other: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Would you like to be contacted about the status of a service request that you have reported?

**YES | NO**

If yes, how?    \_\_\_\_\_ Email  
                    \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Call  
                    \_\_\_\_\_ Pager  
                    \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Have you filled out more than one service request for the same issues?

**YES | NO**

If yes, why?    \_\_\_\_\_ To have the issue addressed quicker  
                    \_\_\_\_\_ Didn't hear back on status of the service request  
                    \_\_\_\_\_ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

---

On average, how long does it take for you to hear back on service requests that you have submitted?

- ☐ Less than 1 hour
- ☐ Over 1 hour
- ☐ Over 2 hours
- ☐ Over 3 hours
- ☐ Over 6 hours
- ☐ Over 12 hours
- ☐ More than 1 day
- ☐ More than 3 days
- ☐ More than 1 week
- ☐ Never
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

---

If it would be easier to report service requests, do you think that you would report them more frequently?

YES | NO

If yes, why? ☐ Ensure that the service requests are addressed quickly  
☐ There are a lot of problems that occur in the building  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

---

Please add any more comments here: \_\_\_\_\_

---

---

---

---

---

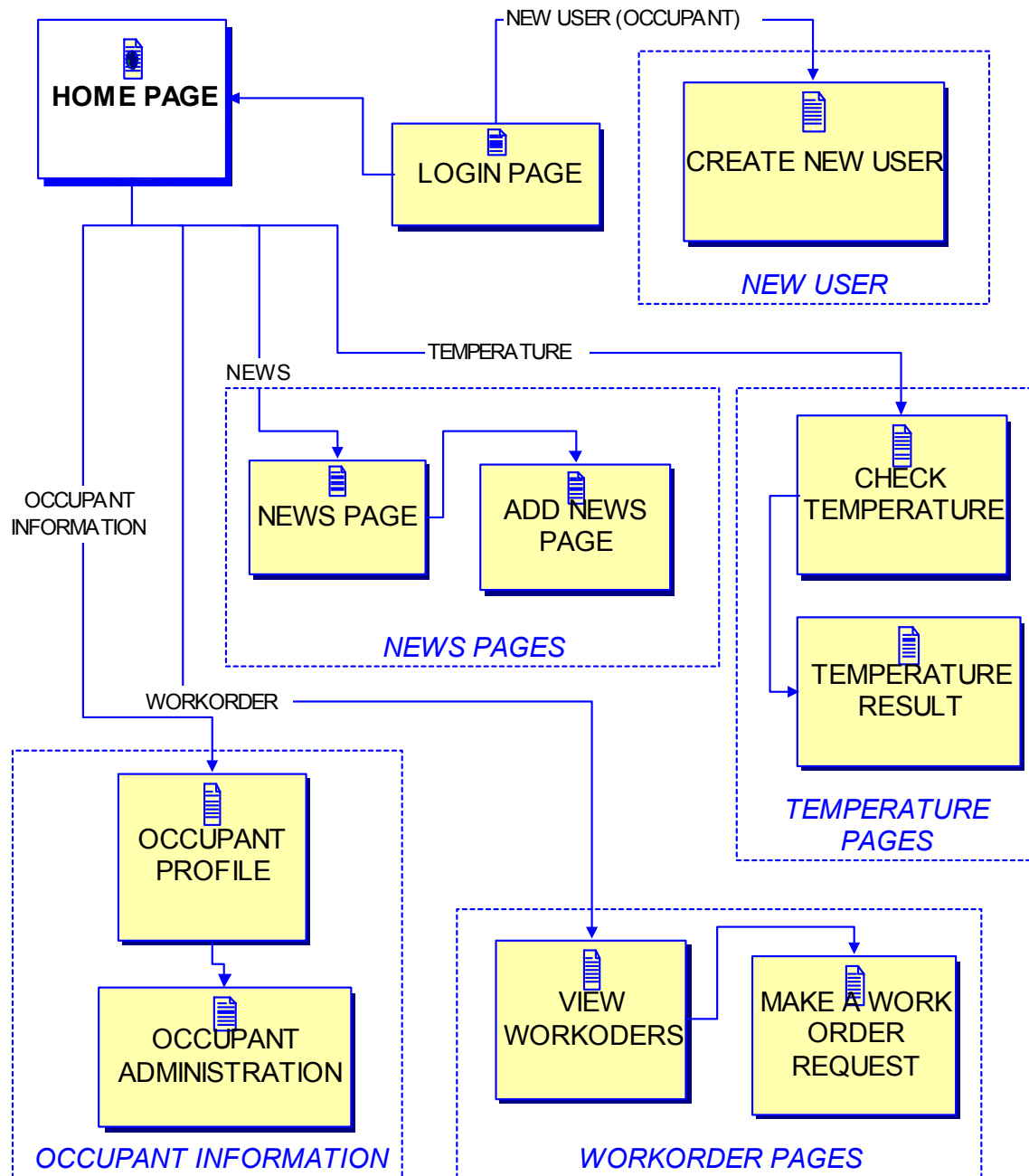



Figure 1: Site diagram of the user interface.





U.S. General Services Administration

Logout

Home

News & Weather

Service Request

Profile

Welcome to GSA's Tenant Interface for GEMNet Portal

Through this portal you can:

- Read important building [news](#)
- Submit and view [Service Request](#) information.
- Get a glimpse of the outside [weather](#)

All news Headlines

[\(View all News\)](#)

| Last 10 Service Requests  | Date Reported On | Status      |
|---|------------------|-------------|
| the urinal on the northwest side of the mens restroom is running. The water is not over flowing a contant running. Location in inside 4800          | 2/4/2003         | In Progress |
| clogged drain in eastside kitchen near rm 4846  | 1/31/2003        | Completed   |
| Bugs!! please spray.  | 1/30/2003        | Closed      |
| please turn the fan back on in room 3730  | 1/22/2003        | Completed   |
| There is a burnt smell in the stair well at door 3730 between the 3rd and 4th floor.  | 1/22/2003        | Completed   |
| I called this in already but rm 3730 has no air flow. Please check.   | 1/17/2003        | Completed   |
| room 4868 file cabinet drawer is stuck again.   | 1/17/2003        | Closed      |
| room 3725 is frozen will please give her some heat?   | 1/13/2003        | Closed      |
| it a freezed out in room 3734.  | 1/10/2003        | Closed      |
| in room 4801 it is too cold. Mr Cool that would be my room. Vent is blowing out cold air above me. I?ve been out with the flu for days please help. | 1/10/2003        | Closed      |

[\(View all Service Requests\)](#)

**Figure 2: Home page of the user interface.**

GSA

U.S. General Services Administration

Logout

Home

Temperature

News & Weather

Service Request

Profile

View Profile

Edit Profile

View all Profiles

Building Settings

Edit Profile:

Please update personal and location information.

- Personal information allows for service requests to be correctly submitted.

Edit Profile Information

Personal Information

First Name:

Luis

Last Name:

Villafana

Work Phone:

Change Password

Enter your NEW Password:

Confirm your NEW Password:

Edit Profile

Cancel

**Figure 3: Page used to edit personal profile.**

GSA

U.S. General Services Administration

Logout

[Home](#)
[News & Weather](#)
[Service Request](#)
[Profile](#)

[View Open Service Requests](#)
[Create a New Service Request](#)

**Service Request Log:**  
This is a list of service requests that you have submitted.

- Service Request Number** is a unique number used to track service request.
- Description** of the service request issue.
- Reported On**, date service request entered.
- Status** is an updated standing of the service request. Under review while pending. Please wait for status update.
- [Enter a new service request](#)

**Your Service Requests (53)**


Filter Options: Select Status to View

☐ Closed  
☐ Completed  
☐ In Progress  
☐ View all service requests

Filter

| Service Request No. | Description  | Date Reported On      | Status      |
|---------------------|--|-----------------------|-------------|
| 71972               | the urinal on the northwest side of the mens restroom is running. The water is not over flowing a contant running. Location in inside 4800 | 2/4/2003 2:31:02 PM   | In Progress |
| 70932               | clogged drain in eastside kitchen near rm 4846   | 1/31/2003 8:49:44 AM  | Completed   |
| 70384               | Bugs!! please spray.   | 1/30/2003 8:16:13 AM  | Closed      |
| 69355               | please turn the fan back on in room 3730   | 1/22/2003 1:11:12 PM  | Completed   |
| 69353               | There is a burnt smell in the stair well at door 3730 between the 3rd and 4th floor.   | 1/22/2003 1:08:13 PM  | Completed   |
| 68873               | I called this in already but rm 3730 has no air flow. Please check.  | 1/17/2003 1:12:50 PM  | Completed   |
| 68750               | room 4868 file cabinet drawer is stuck again.  | 1/17/2003 7:27:54 AM  | Closed      |
| 68073               | room 3725 is frozen will please give her some heat?  | 1/13/2003 10:14:40 AM | Closed      |
| 67883               | it a freezeed out in room 3734.  | 1/10/2003             | Closed      |

**Figure 4: Page used to view previously submitted service requests.**



U.S. General Services Administration

[Logout](#)

[Home](#)
[News & Weather](#)
[Service Request](#)
[Profile](#)

[View Open Service Requests](#)
[Create a New Service Request](#)

**New Service Request Instructions:**  
Please read these instructions before entering a new service request

1. Ensure local temperature is within GSA policy.
2. Check that required fields(\*) are updated and accurate.
3. Enter or select the floor for which the problem is being reported for.
4. Select the problem type that best describes this service request.
5. After completing these steps, continue to the next form.
6. Please do not submit multiple service requests for the same issue.

**Step 1. Ensure the local temperature is within GSA policy**

The acceptable temperature range is **70°F to 77°F** according to GSA Energy Policy

**Step 2. Verify Contact Information and Select Problem Type**

Please verify that the information in this form is accurate and up to date. \* [Fields can be changed by updating Profile](#)

\* **Reported by:**

\* **Phone No.:**

**Date & Time:** 2/6/2003 11:20:20 AM

\* **Building:** Tucson

**Step 3. Select Affected Floor and Problem type**

Please select the floor for which the service request is being reported for. Then, select the type that best describes the problem. If not listed, select other.

**Type impacted floor:**   
(ie. "02,03")

**Problem Type:** Please Select

Continue
Cancel

**Figure 5: First page used to submit a new service request. Many service requests involve temperature problems, so the user interface shows the indoor temperature and the policy for indoor temperature.**

U.S. General Services Administration

[Logout](#)

[Home](#)
[Temperature](#)
[News & Weather](#)
[Service Request](#)
[Profile](#)

[View Open Service Requests](#)
[Create a New Service Request](#)
[All Buildings](#)

### New Service Request Instructions:

Please read these instructions before entering a new service request

1. Please enter a very detailed description of the problem being submitted, including: cause, location, when first noticed, how long it has been occurring, and any other information that will help to quickly identify and address the issue. ?If the problem is related to temperature please select the closest thermostat label to where the problem is. If a thermostat is not located nearby or has no label, please leave blank.
2. If a list of service request is displayed, please review it for multiple listings. If you find similar problems reported do not submit this service request or if it is related but distinct, please include the number of those service requests. This will ensure that the maintenance team will receive more accurate information to address the problem.
3. You may now enter the service request to be reviewed by the

### Step 4. Enter Detailed Description and Enter Thermostat

Please enter a very **detailed** description of the problem being submitted, including: cause, location, when first noticed, how long it has been occurring, and any other information that will help to quickly identify and address the issue. If the problem is related to **temperature** please select the closest thermostat label to where the problem is. If a thermostat is not located nearby or has no label, please leave blank.

Nearest Thermostat Label:

Enter Detailed Description:

### Step 5. Review Service Requests

Review the following service requests for multiple entries. These have been submitted within the past two hours for floor: 03. If you find similar service requests to the one you are entering you may elect to not enter the new service request. You may also elect to submit this service request and add the repeating service request number to the description. Please keep in mind that all service requests will be addressed by the maintenance department and duplicate entries do slow down response time since each is reviewed.

| Ser Req # | Description | Status |
|-----------|-------------|--------|
|           |             |        |

### Step 6. Submit new service request.

You can determine whether you have found a similar or duplicate service request number and enter that number. After that, you may submit this information to create a new service

**Figure 6: Second page used to submit a new service request. The user interface informs users of previously submitted service requests that may be similar to this service request.**

GSA

U.S. General Services Administration

Logout

Home

Temperature

News & Weather

Service Request

Profile

News/Weather

Add News

News & Weather

Current information impacting the building, electricity, and weather.

- Building news

on current events impact the entire building.
- Electricity news

impacting the state of California. Click on the link to view the latest electricity news from the California ISO.

Select: | Building News | Electricity News | Weather Information |

Building News

Title: Elevators to be serviced

Body: Please note that the main elevators will be serviced between 3:00pm and 4:00pm today, 2/6/03.

Posted on: 2/6/2003 11:08:45 AM

End date: 2/7/2003 11:08:45 AM

Building: Tucson

Edit | Delete |

Electricity News

Visit California ISO for Electricity News

Search for Electrical Emergencies

Weather

Enter a City or US Zip:

Tucson, AZ

Reported by Davis/Monahan, AZ

Sunny

Thu Feb 06 11:55 AM MT

Temperature: 57°F/14°C

Humidity: 27%

Barometer: 30.07in/1019mb


Winds: VAR at 5mph/8kph

Click for Forecast

THE WEATHER CHANNEL

weather.com

Figure 7: Page used to check news and weather. Notices on this page can only be deleted by the administrator.



U.S. General Services Administration

[Logout](#)

[Home](#)
[Temperature](#)
[News & Weather](#)
[Service Request](#)
[Profile](#)

**Temperature**

In this page you can view the temperature for your default thermostat or set a default thermostat.

- **Default Thermostat** provides the latest temperature of your default thermostat. Your default thermostat is stored in your [profile](#). In order to set a default thermostat follow the next steps.
- To **Set** a thermostat as the default in your profile or **Find** a thermostat in the building you need to:
  1. Select a **Floor**.
  2. Select the nearest **Thermostat** closest to you by reading the label on it.
  3. The **Temperature** information will be displayed. In order to select this thermostat as the default in your profile, click on the button.

Closest Thermostat (8E-14 ) Temperature Last modified: 12/16/2001 8:26:02 AM

71 ?F / 22?C (Last modified: 12/16/2001 8:26:02 AM)

Set or Find closest thermostat temperature

Step 1. Select Your Floor

Step 2. Select the nearest thermostat label

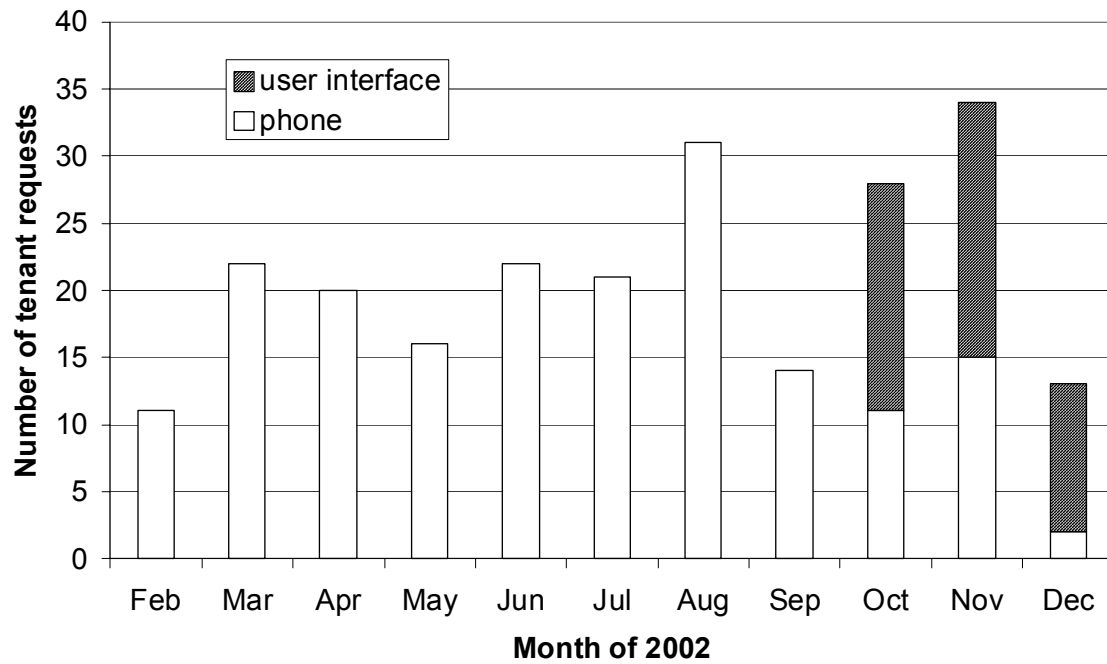
Step 3. After selecting the floor and thermostat, the temperature will be displayed below.

The temperature at thermostat label 4E-12 is 72°F / 23°C  
It was last updated on: 5/1/2002 1:23:55 PM

Click on the button below to set 4E-12 as your default thermostat.

Set as Default

**Figure 8: Page used to check indoor temperature. This page causes the user interface to query the GEMNet database for the most recent reading at the specified location and to display it in the browser. This page also gives the user the option to change their default location.**



**Figure 9: Number of service requests submitted by a lead user.**



# HPCBS

## High Performance Commercial Building Systems

### A Tenant Interface for Energy and Maintenance Systems

*Element 5. Integrated Commissioning and Diagnostics*

*Project 2.2 - Monitoring and Commissioning of Existing Buildings*

*Task 2.2.4 - Develop methods of incorporating feedback from occupants into diagnostic systems*

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# A Tenant Interface for Energy and Maintenance Systems

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## ABSTRACT

We describe the design of a user interface for energy and maintenance systems in commercial buildings. The user interface is for use by occupants (tenants) of commercial buildings. Our hypothesis is that by allowing tenants access to information from the energy and maintenance systems and by giving them some control over these systems, energy and maintenance performance can be improved. We used interviews with potential users and existing energy and maintenance databases to guide the design.

## Keywords

User interface, energy management, maintenance, buildings

## INTRODUCTION

Energy and maintenance systems in commercial buildings consist of digital control devices, a communications network, databases, applications for various functions, and a user interface. One of the most advanced energy and maintenance systems developed to date is GEMNet [1]. GEMNet is an integrated information technology infrastructure for energy and maintenance management. It uses a common database system for all components and an open communications protocol called BACNet [2].

GEMNet uses modern web-based technology for its user interface. However, the intended users of GEMNet only include maintenance personnel. The way that building occupants interact with GEMNet is by making a telephone call to someone in the maintenance department to request service or report a problem. The maintenance personnel manually enter the service request into GEMNet, sometimes long after the phone call has been made.

Our work on the interaction between building occupants and energy and maintenance systems [3,4] suggests that building occupants should also be considered users of energy and maintenance systems. Until recently this has been considered an unwise, even radical, idea among facility management professionals. However, providing tenants with a user interface to energy and maintenance

systems should improve thermal comfort, improve the performance of energy management strategies, eliminate some redundant service requests, and improve the quality of data in maintenance databases. A well-designed user interface should also improve the satisfaction of the occupants with the services provided to them by maintenance personnel.

In this paper we describe the design of a Tenant Interface for Energy and Maintenance Systems (TIEMS). TIEMS is designed to operate as a component of GEMNet. The next section covers the methods we used for design. The following section includes the results of our pre-design investigations, and a description of the design itself. We conclude with a section on expected benefits of TIEMS.

## METHODS

We interviewed three tenants from three different agencies in a U.S. federal building. We asked questions designed to provide information about how the problem reporting process currently works, their satisfaction with the current process, their needs for changes, and whether or not they would be receptive to our proposed design ideas.

We held meetings with the building energy and maintenance staff to discuss our concepts for the design of the user interface. We described our previous research results, proposed our design for TIEMS, and asked for their feedback.

We used the results in [3,4] and current maintenance records to guide the design of TIEMS. These sources of information include maintenance records from hundreds of buildings covering a duration of several years in total

## RESULTS

From the interviews with tenants, we learned the following:

1. All tenants currently report service requests by telephone. Office assistants usually report problems on behalf of others.
2. The average satisfaction level with the reporting process was 2 on a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being the most satisfied and 5 the least satisfied.
3. All tenants complained about not being able to track the status of service requests. Some tenants would

prefer to check status at a web site, while others would like to receive email. Some tenants want to be able to check indoor temperatures from a browser, and some tenants would like to be able to access maintenance notices from a browser or by email.

4. Tenants sometimes submit more than one service request for the same problem because they cannot track the status of their service requests and because they think it will reduce the response time.
5. Two of the tenants surveyed said they would use a web-based service request form.
6. One of the tenants said that they would be more likely to report problems if it were easier to report them.

Maintenance personnel told us that it is common for maintenance or construction activities to produce many redundant service requests.

From results in [3,4], and GSA maintenance databases we learned the following:

1. Temperature complaints are the most common service request.
2. In well-controlled buildings, half of the temperature complaints occur when the temperature is within the bounds specified in [5].
3. Data quality in maintenance databases is poor. Most of the fields are populated by hand.

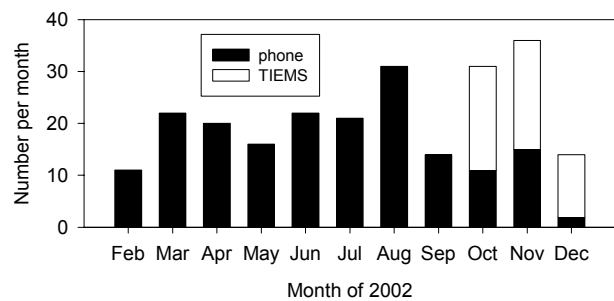
Based on these findings, we included four key features in TIEMS. The first is the ability to check the status of service requests. User's can check the status of all service request they submitted and filter the display by status condition.

The second feature checks for service requests submitted from the same location during the past two hours. The design intent is to eliminate redundant service requests. TIEMS lets the tenant decide whether or not it is redundant.

The third feature of TIEMS is a list of notices that the maintenance personnel feel will convey useful information to the tenants. Tenants only see notices that apply to their location. Maintenance personnel can specify the length of time that the notices run.

The fourth key feature of TIEMS is the ability to check indoor temperatures. TIEMS displays the most recent temperature value from the GEMNet database corresponding to the location specified by the user.

Figure 1 shows results of a three-month field trial. The figure shows the number of service requests reported by three lead users per month. No data were available before February 2002. The figure demonstrates that users will use TIEMS for a significant fraction of service requests, eliminating the labor required to answer phone requests. Whether or not TIEMS affects the number of service requests is inconclusive. One of the lead users said "I love the system".



**Figure 1: Results of TIEMS field trial.**

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

We expect the following benefits from TIEMS:

1. Reduced labor required for handling service requests
2. Better energy management resulting from better temperature control
3. Improved occupant satisfaction with maintenance services

The field trial demonstrated that TIEMS can reduce the labor required to answer phone requests, and that it increases occupant satisfaction with maintenance performance. The temperature checking feature of TIEMS should make it easy to identify whether or not a temperature problem is because of equipment failure or disagreement with temperature-related energy management practices.

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